

national park service

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Critical Habitat Protection Measures at Point Reyes National Seashore

The federally-listed threatened snowy plover nesting season is underway. Last year, the plovers at Point Reyes National Seashore had a successful nesting season due to intensive protection, monitoring, and educational efforts. Efforts included the construction of “exclosures” around their inconspicuous nests immediately after an egg was laid. To assure this success continues this nesting season, the closure of a small stretch of the Point Reyes Beach to dogs will be initiated again.

“This is the most critical time of the nesting season for these birds to have a chance of surviving,” stated Superintendent Don Neubacher. He added, “We must do what we can to help this species survive over the long-term and this is one step we can take to reach this goal. We ask everyone’s help in this effort.”

Closing a small stretch of the 12-mile beach to dogs is mandatory to minimize disturbance during this critical time. The stretch of beach starting at ¼ mile north of the North Beach parking lot and continuing to a point ¼ mile south of Kehoe Beach, will be closed to dogs from Friday, March 17th until Monday, September 15th, 2000. The closures encompass less than three miles of this 12 mile beach area. Other popular beaches such as South, Limantour, and Kehoe Beaches remain open as alternatives for park visitors with dogs.

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Point Reyes National Seashore Point Reyes Station, California 94956

Exclosures are wire fencing with twine wrapped around the top, erected at the nest site. The plovers have easy access in and out of the wire mesh but the eggs are protected from their number one predator, ravens, as well as other predators.

Currently, only 2,000 western snowy plovers occur in the West. Most of the suitable habitat for these birds has been lost to development and recreational activities. As recently as 1987, over 70 nests were known to occur along some of Point Reyes' beaches. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the snowy plover population had been on the decline since the 1970s, and listed the species as threatened in 1993. In 1995, only five chicks hatched from eggs at Point Reyes National Seashore, yet 20 nests were observed with 2-3 eggs in each of the nests. With the additional protection of the exclosures during the 1999 breeding season, 24 chicks fledged! The number of chicks could double with the continued protection of this temporary beach closure during nesting season.

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